



San Francisco Office
of Early Care & Education

San Francisco Office of Early Care and Education – COVID-19 POSITION PAPER

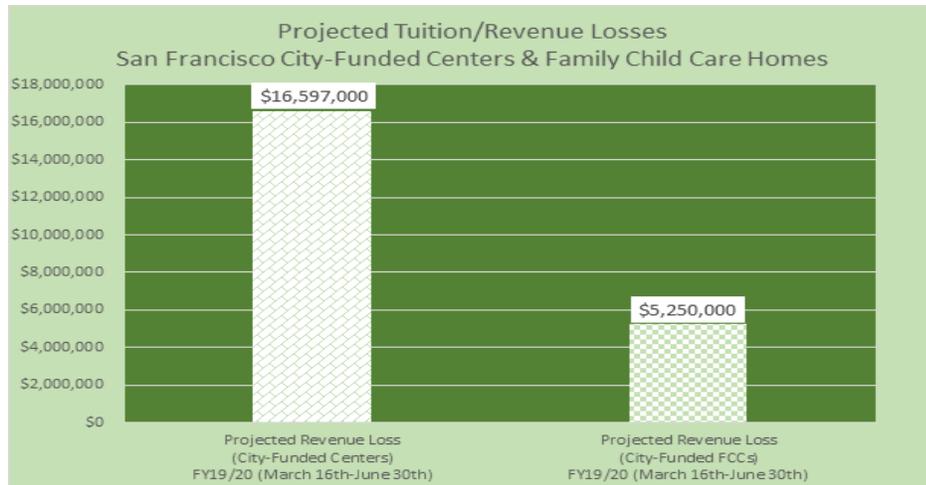
The coronavirus public health crisis highlights the challenges of decades of underinvestment in the early care and education (ECE) system, exposing deep inequities and making them worse. During the 2010 recession, early care and education programs took substantial hits in funding, decimating systems that prepare children to enter kindergarten and keep families strong and communities afloat. This crisis makes it clear how the gross under-investment in this critical service impacts every aspect of our economy. Consequently, this sector is uncared and hidden, yet there is no economic recovery without the ECE system.

Rather than rush to rebuild the status quo of inequality, we should encourage a deep structural transition to an economy that better values the work we know is essential to sustaining us. As a result, policymakers must commit to maintaining and strengthening the ECE infrastructure for the essential-worker families who need it now during this public health emergency, *and* for every parent needing to return safely to work in the near future. This means maintaining our ECE infrastructure for essential workers and sustaining our ECE system whole. Lawmakers must make child care part of the solution to economic recovery in order to pull communities out of economic recession as quickly as possible. A speedy and equitable economic recovery that works for everyone, especially those hit hardest, depends on policymakers providing funding and supports that sustain the nation's early care and education system during and after the crisis.

The San Francisco Office of Early Care and Education recommends the following policies and practices to provide sufficient and adequate support for current emergency

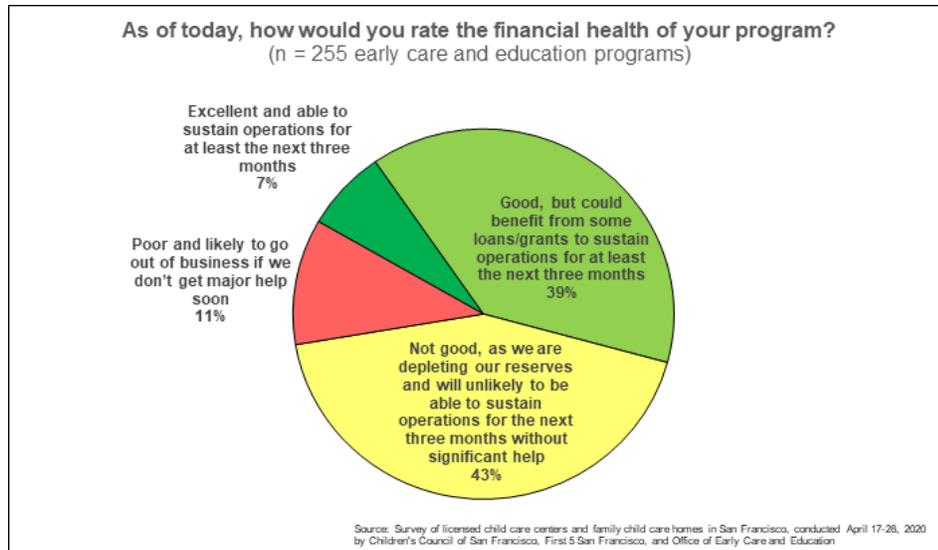
early education, as well as continued investment to ensure that the ECE system remains whole and prepared to open when the current restrictions begin to be relaxed:

- Congress must prioritize early care and education funding in all recovery and stimulus efforts. Investing in ECE is an investment in public health, and in our economic recovery from the current crisis.
- The \$350 million in Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) funding under the federal CARES stimulus package must be increased and dedicated to childcare. We need to be sure ALL of that money remains allocated to ECE, not supplanted for other uses.
- Emergency-care funds target early education programs within the current system that remain open to supply emergency care at no cost to essential workers, regardless of income. ECE programs that offer emergency care operate at lower-than-usual capacity but face additional per-child expenses due to increased staffing costs, new hygiene and safety measures, and higher costs of some supplies. Therefore, relief funds should compensate early educators for emergency care at a higher reimbursement rate than usual per-child rates.
- Relief funds must also target early care and education programs that are facing revenue losses in order to ensure they can resume typical operations as the economy moves towards recovery. Programs not offering emergency care are closed, but relief funds should cover 100 percent of operating costs on the condition that these programs continue to pay their staff at regular wages, and reopen for business after crisis regulations are relaxed.
- Projected loss of revenue for early care and education centers and family child care programs in San Francisco between mid-march and June 30, 2020 due to COVID-19 is approximately \$21.8M:



Accordingly, the state must allocate increased funds to expand access to emergency care and increased compensation for ECE teachers that provide this essential service to front-line workers, including funding required for supplies like diapers, wipes, formula and cleaning supplies at ECE facilities.

- Payments to ECE teachers in California must continue until the shelter-in-place order is lifted. Currently, Alternative Payment (AP) contractors are only authorized to reimburse those ECE programs paid through a subsidy voucher/certificate for 30 calendar days from the date of closure. These 30 days have expired for many early educators, decreasing the likelihood of re-opening after the shelter in place. These payments must be extended to ensure these child care educators remain in business for San Francisco’s children and families after the COVID-19 pandemic. Fifty-four percent of ECE programs surveyed in San Francisco rated the financial health of their program as ‘Poor’ or ‘Not Good’:



- \$503 Million in one-time funding allocated to child care and early education in the 2019-2020 California state budget must be used to continue to support the ECE system in California and not be reallocated elsewhere.
- ECE educators are essential service workers providing needed service for the children of other essential workers and at-risk children. Our educators need access to COVID-19 testing to ensure safety and limit the spread of the virus. Reopening additional parts of the economy requires increased access to testing for the early education workforce.

The COVID-19 pandemic presents a long-term danger to the entire ECE system across the country. While immediate funding may fill gaps within our ECE system, it is important to acknowledge the need for underlying structural changes in the system infrastructure looking ahead. Policymakers should pursue changes that ensure that all families have access to high quality, affordable early education provided by ECE professionals compensated in line with the essential services they provide. This crisis has demonstrated the critical value of early care and education in meeting both the immediate and future needs of our country. The vital role ECE plays in ensuring kindergarten readiness for young children and supports for working families builds the resilience needed during this economic downturn and will continue well after the pandemic is over.